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Bryan's March 26 Letter Helps Secure USVI Exemption From Proposed Maritime Port Fees

USTR's final ruling spares the Virgin Islands from steep shipping surcharges after Governor Bryan's direct appeal highlighted the territory's heavy reliance on imports and unique supply chain vulnerabilities.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has expressed gratitude to the Trump Administration and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) for exempting the U.S. Virgin Islands from a sweeping set of proposed maritime fees that could have significantly impacted the territory's economy and raised federal revenue collection from the shipping industry nationwide.

The exemption, announced this week by USTR following a Section 301 investigation into China's shipbuilding and maritime dominance, spares the Virgin Islands from harsh new port fees that would have applied to Chinese-built vessels, even those flagged or operated by U.S. entities. Without the exemption, Governor Bryan warned, the Virgin Islands could have faced disproportionate economic harm, given its heavy reliance on imported goods.

In a March 26 letter to USTR Ambassador Jamieson Greer, Governor Bryan emphasized that more than 95% of all goods entering the Virgin Islands—including food, medicine, and construction materials—arrive via maritime shipping, much of it on smaller, shallow draft vessels that would have been subject to the new fees.

"This outcome is the result of strong leadership, strategic engagement, and sustained collaboration," Bryan said in a statement issued Friday. "I want to personally thank President Donald Trump, Ambassador Jamieson Greer, and the entire team at the USTR for hearing our case and recognizing the unique supply chain vulnerabilities faced by the Virgin Islands"?.

The governor also credited maritime industry stakeholders and congressional allies for supporting the territory's request. He offered specific thanks to Tim Martin and Jennifer Nugent Hill of Tropical Shipping, Delegate Stacey Plaskett, other members of Congress, and the territory's federal lobbying team in Washington, D.C.

"Together, we ensured that Virgin Islanders were not left behind," Bryan said.

The USTR's final determination incorporates specific exemptions aligned with the governor's recommendations. These include exemptions for short haul routes, small vessels under 4,000 TEUs, and U.S.-owned or U.S.-flagged ships, many of which serve the Virgin Islands directly?.

Governor Bryan emphasized that the exemption not only shields the Virgin Islands from the proposed financial burden but also safeguards the territory's role in supporting broader U.S. national security and logistics resilience throughout the Caribbean Basin.

"This decision recognizes the Virgin Islands' strategic importance as America's third border and affirms the value of having our voices heard in the halls of power," Bryan said. "It underscores what we can achieve when the territory's federal priorities are clearly communicated and forcefully advocated for through leadership, unity, and collaboration"?.

The governor concluded by reaffirming his administration's commitment to maintaining a strong presence in Washington to ensure that future federal policies reflect the economic realities of life in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"This exemption is a significant victory, but it is also part of a larger effort to ensure that every federal policy and regulation considers the unique realities of life in the U.S. Virgin Islands," he said. "We will continue to lead with solutions, engage in good faith, and advocate with purpose to ensure a stronger, more secure future for our people."